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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000430

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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT TO IRAN

¶1. (U) BRUNEI'S FOREIGN MINISTER, PRINCE MOHAMED BOLKIAH, VISITED IRAN APRIL 10-12. THE APRIL 18 EDITION OF THE BORNEO BULLETIN, DRAWING FROM A JOINT STATEMENT ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE VISIT, REPORTED THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES HAD "FORTIFIED THEIR EXCELLENT BILATERAL RELATIONS."

¶2. (U) THE PRESS REPORT CITED THREE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE VISIT: (A) AN AGREEMENT TO EXEMPT HOLDERS OF DIPLOMATIC AND OFFICIAL PASSPORTS FROM VISA FOR SHORT OFFICIAL AND/OR TRANSIT VISITS; (B) AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO EXCHANGE LAND ON A RECIPROCAL BASIS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF EMBASSIES IN EACH OTHER'S CAPITAL; AND (C) AN OFFER BY IRAN OF SHORT-TERM DIPLOMATIC TRAINING FOR BRUNEIAN DIPLOMATS. A JOINT COMMISSION WILL BE ESTABLISHED AT THE FOREIGN MINISTERS' LEVEL TO PERIODICALLY REVIEW PROGRESS IN AREAS OF MUTUAL INTEREST, WITH THE FIRST MEETING TO BE HELD EARLY NEXT YEAR IN BRUNEI.

¶3. (C) PRINCE MOHAMED REVIEWED HIS TRIP WITH ME APRIL 18. HE SAID HE HAD A GOOD VISIT, WITH MOSTLY BILATERAL MATTERS DISCUSSED. HE FOUND THE COUNTRY BEAUTIFUL, AND REMARKED ON THE ABSENCE OF TOURISTS, WHICH HE THOUGHT COULD BE A REVENUE-RAISER. HE REMARKED THAT THERE IS A LOT OF POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN BRUNEI AND IRAN, BUT DID NOT ELABORATE.

¶4. (C) TO MY QUESTION, HE CORRECTED AN INITIAL PRESS REPORT WHICH HAD ALLEGED THAT BRUNEIAN STUDENTS WOULD BE ATTENDING IRANIAN UNIVERSITIES. THE FOREIGN MINISTER SAID THAT IRAN HAD ONLY OFFERED SHORT-TERM COURSES FOR BRUNEIAN DIPLOMATS. HE SAID THAT OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE MADE SIMILAR OFFERS, AND BRUNEI WELCOMES SUCH TRAINING. NO DECISION HAS BEEN MADE CONCERNING ACCEPTING IRAN'S OFFER, BUT THE MINISTER SAID HE SEES NO PROBLEMS WITH IT.

¶4. (C) PRINCE MOHAMED SAID THAT IRAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER HAD RAISED THE QUESTION OF EXTENSION OF THE NPT DURING THEIR MEETING. MINISTER VELYATI HAD TOLD HIM THAT HE IS CONFIDENT THAT THE NPT WILL BE EXTENDED. I ASKED WHETHER IRAN HAD INDICATED WHETHER IT WOULD SUPPORT INDEFINITE EXTENSION. THE MINISTER REPLIED THAT VELYATI HAD SAID THAT IRAN WILL LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE DEBATE TO SEE HOW IT PROCEEDS BEFORE MAKING A DECISION.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: BRUNEI AND IRAN CONTINUE TO APPEAR TO THIS EMBASSY AS STRANGE BEDFELLOWS, GIVEN IRAN'S ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT, BUT THE RELATIONSHIP CONTINUES TO DEVELOP. THE SULTAN AND PRESIDENT RAFSANJANI HAVE EXCHANGED STATE VISITS, AND

FOREIGN MINISTER VALYATI WILL VISIT BRUNEI NEXT YEAR TO HEAD THE IRANIAN TEAM FOR THE FIRST JOINT COMMISSION MEETING. WE KNOW THAT BRUNEI KEEPS A CAREFUL EYE ON THE IRANIAN EMBASSY'S ACTIVITIES, WHICH SUGGESTS THAT OFFICIAL VISITS NOTWITHSTANDING, BRUNEI REMAINS WARY OF IRAN'S ULTIMATE INTENTIONS. CONSISTENT WITH BRUNEI'S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH OF "FRIEND OF ALL, ENEMY OF NONE", HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT THE RELATIONSHIP WILL CONTINUE GRADUALLY, AND CAREFULLY, TO EXPAND. END COMMENT

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